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## The Journal of Criminal Justice Research

### **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# **THE TRAGIC QUALITY OF CONTRACT GUARDS: A DISCUSSION OF THE REACH AND THEORY OF PRIVATE SECURITY IN THE WORLD TODAY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Over the past decades, private security has been significantly on the rise worldwide. In order to understand the causes and consequences of this phenomenon, scholars must begin mapping out the historical trajectories of private security in national jurisdictions. Moreover, detailed international comparisons are needed for grasping similarities and differences between countries, with a particular focus on the exact perils and rewards of private security arrangements. This paper argues that state institutions are pivotal in facilitating and directing the practice of private policing and security industries. Governments cannot shirk their responsibility to regulate contract guards to ensure a fair and effective protection of their citizenry. In pursuit of that end, the authors provide some snapshot descriptions of national industries, along with preferred research agendas to deepen the understanding of the social, legal and political impacts of private security on contemporary societies.

### ***Author Biographies***

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*'It has become conventional wisdom that policing is changing in all countries and transnationally' (Marenin, 2005: 101).*

## INTRODUCTION

From Europe to the Americas, from Africa to Asia and from Australia back to Europe, we observe the same pattern: a mushrooming of contract guards on all continents of the world. In some countries, private security is even outnumbering the workforce of public police agencies. This trend is not particularly surprising, as traditional state-led police are relative latecomers in society. Citizens and agencies other than the police have always been involved in order maintenance and peacekeeping (Johnston, 1992; Rawlings, 2003). Most modern constabulary forces are, at best, only 200 years old. Moreover, our 'modern' police bodies that evolved and grew during the nineteenth century institutionalization of state power have never eradicated the private (paid and unpaid) forms of policing that preceded them (Zedner, 2006a). What is new, though, is the deepening hegemony of *commercialized* policing over long-standing civil initiatives. Some scholars even argue that state dominance over the past two centuries can be interpreted as a 'historical hiccup' (Shearing, 2005: 62) rather than a long-term reality. Due to the rise of multiple profit-seeking security providers and auspices, history may well wipe out the taken-for-granted idea of state-based governance that many cherish.

Whether this bold prediction holds ground or not, given the 'silent rise' of private security, it is remarkable that the body of knowledge on the nature and extent of industries, although steadily evolving, is still limited. There is very little cross-national knowledge about the security industry worldwide. This lack of comparison is also reflected in police studies more generally. As Jones and Newburn (2006a: 1) write, 'despite the burgeoning academic interest in policing, there remains a relative dearth of comparative research in this field'. For Mawby (1990) such a blind spot can be explained by the lack of reliable data, intellectual 'silliness', chauvinism and by practical reasons of language, access and expense. In line with this, Manning (2005: 32) points to heavy Anglo-Saxon 'ethnocentrism', which tends to ignore the influences that local histories, policies, economics and cultures have on emerging private security industries around the globe. Empirical insights from non-English language countries are barely present in the literature.

Yet, at the same time, there seems to be an increasing awareness of the vital contributions cross-national comparisons can make to our understanding of private security. In essence, comparative research is of great importance for grasping the similarities and differences between nation-states, and to gain deeper insights into the reality of jurisdictions around the world. First of all, cross-national research can contribute to a better understanding of how policing landscapes become the way they are, and, second, it can lead to an in-depth analysis of the socio-political impact plural (i.e. public and private) policing networks may have (Jones and Newburn, 2006a: 2–4). Bayley and Shearing (1996: 588) argue that the augmentation of private security companies illustrates a watershed in the evolutions of their systems of crime control and

law enforcement. Future generations will look back on our era as a time when one system of policing ended and another took its place.

We should be careful, however, before jumping to conclusions about the *exact causes and consequences* of the growth of private security worldwide. Theoretical (and normative) notions should not lose sight of empirical evidence (Jones and Newburn, 2002, 2006a, b). Therefore, this chapter addresses the need for better-informed debate about the flourishing of private security companies worldwide in order to analyze the depth and breadth of an assumed transformation in public order maintenance and social control.

The current paper is clustered around four themes. The first part explores what private security is and how it is measured. This is not an easy task, because, in reality, there is no agreed definition of what exactly constitutes 'private security'. Moreover, official data on growth figures are often lacking, and occupations are highly diversified. Next, the paper maps out private security around the world by presenting data collected from the various resources available. Taking into account the methodological problems mentioned, we are not presenting an in-depth description here, but rather aim to give a brief impression of 'how big' private security industries are. The third part of the paper asks why private security has become so popular in western and developing countries' markets alike. Answers point in various directions, but there is strong evidence that government policy is a key factor (Van Steden, 2007). The fourth and final part discusses what we coin *the tragic quality of contract guards*.<sup>1</sup> Private security may have 'pathological effects' (Johnston, 2007: 32) related to professionalism, exclusionary conduct and social cohesion, and thus additional research into this area is required.

### **Defining Private Security**

On an empirical level, private security is difficult to define. Indeed, Joh (2004) refers to it as a 'paradoxical' concept. Although the law draws a clear distinction between 'public' and 'private', both sectors are increasingly difficult to tell apart. At present, the police and private security industries perform many of the same tasks and have many of the same sorts of responsibilities. Private security companies have deeply penetrated their businesses into the fabric of policing and justice. Nevertheless, there are qualitative distinctions between public and private 'police' as they, arguably, have their own 'toolboxes', goals, resources and strategies (Stenning, 2000; Joh, 2005). Commercial companies must *sell* security, whereas state police forces are generally publicly financed and managed (Shearing and Stenning, 1981, 1983; South, 1998; Rigakos, 2002; Wakefield, 2003).

In addition, and making things more complicated, the private security 'industry' is not a homogenous and steady group, but rather a multitude of evolving sectors, large and small, not having much in common other than what unifies them under the banner of a fairly deceptive 'market of fear' (George and Button, 2000; Zedner, 2006b). For

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<sup>1</sup> This phrase was originally coined in a presentation given by the first author at a 2007 policing conference in Dubai.

example, the Dutch Ministry of Justice distinguishes between (1) private security companies, (2) other companies (such as bars or discos) employing 'in-house' guards, (3) cash-in-transit companies, (4) alarm monitoring stations and (5) private detective firms. Furthermore, there exists a huge security product and equipment sector. There are risk management and consultancy companies, and forensic accountancy services. Private security is increasingly everybody's business. However, since manned guarding (or staffed) services represent, by far, the largest segment of the industry, we specifically focus on this market.

Speaking of manned guarding services, Shearing and Stenning (1981: 196) established two criteria: guards are '(a) privately employed and (b) employed in jobs whose principal component is some security function'. Yet this definition is not watertight, primarily because security guards are increasingly employed by (quasi) public auspices including municipalities, prisons, neighborhood committees, universities and the like. Therefore, Sarre and Prenzler (2009: 4) recently redefined security guards as:

'those persons who are employed or sponsored by a commercial enterprise on a contract or 'in-house' basis, using public or private funds, to engage in tasks (other than vigilante-style action) where the principal component is a security or regulatory function.'

Specifically, this definition covers staff mandated to control crime, protect property and life, and maintain order (Joh, 2004: 55). Again, though, a kaleidoscope of specialized occupations carries out such duties. Consider, among others, static guards, shop guards, airport guards, bouncers (or door supervisors) and event security officers whose shared characteristics are numerous. They all

- do their work for profit;
  - are hired by paying customers;
  - serve individual customer interests;
  - normally wear conspicuous uniforms;
  - sometimes carry firearms or make use of dogs;
  - derive their powers from civil and contract laws.
- (adapted from Van Steden, 2007)

In the first instance, scholars defined contract guards' natural habitat as 'mass private properties,' ranging from shopping malls to airport terminals (Shearing and Stenning, 1981, 1983), but today wider 'communal spaces' like neighborhoods, town squares and entertainment districts are taken into consideration too (Kempa et al., 2004). Guarding personnel are, in fact, pervasively present in the wider public domain of towns and cities.

### ***Measuring Private Security***

In measuring and counting private security, we carried out desk research by consulting (academic) publications and gathering statistics from census databases and market

research. Trying to sketch the precise contours of private security industries turned out to be tricky, because what has mostly been available was fragmented information that suffers from various difficulties (Jones and Newburn, 1995; Prenzler, 2005; Van Steden and Huberts, 2005). First, the quality of accessible sources varies considerably from country to country. Second, registration systems do not always differentiate between full-time and an apparently sizeable group of part-time personnel, which probably leads to an over-estimation of workforces. On the other hand, however, 'in-house' staff are often not counted, so it could also be argued that we are actually under-estimating the size of private security. Third, because of fierce competition, private firms do not like to advertise their earnings and personnel numbers to researchers and, fourth, private security companies, especially the transnational ones, are delivering services that go beyond what is commonly thought of as private security. They are, for example, involved in ambulance and rescue work, facility management, training programs and custodial care that have little to do with general guarding activities. Industries thus flow in multifarious sectors, making counting a precarious undertaking. Having this said, we still think it is worthwhile to present international data on the reach of private security worldwide. The data shown below give the most complete overview delivered so far in the academic literature, and can serve as an anchor point for more meticulous comparative studies.

### ***International Comparisons***

Despite the fact that any attempt to measure private security must be hedged with caveats, there is widespread consensus among observers about the mounting pervasiveness of private security personnel in many countries (Jones and Newburn, 2006b). The following snapshots from a variety of countries and regions have been drawn from a growing list of articles, reports and reviews devoted to the subject of privatized provision of security. Information on legislative authority and regulatory conditions is also included in the discussion below, where such information is available and of interest. Aside from Antarctica, we list the six world continents below in random order. The country selection is simply a reflection of the availability of reliable data.

### ***North America***

Security industries are so diverse in North America that their data, while not difficult to find, are difficult to compare. Early estimates indicate that 429,000 private staff, compared to 694,000 public law enforcement personnel, were employed in the United States in 1972 (Kakalik and Wildhorn, 1977: 18). According to the Hallcrest report, this number had grown to almost 1 million private employees by 1990 (Cunningham et al., 1990: 196-197). One and a half decades later, the USA boasts some 60,000 security companies, and private industries employ approximately 1.5 to 2 million guards (Manning, 2006: 110). One estimate puts the number of security workers in Canada at around 82,000 compared to just over 59,000 police (Law Commission of Canada, 2002: 9-10). In both the United States and Canada, responsibility for regulation rests on the national and territorial level. Most states (USA) and provinces (Canada) have minimal systems that, compared to many European nations, are relatively weak.

## **Central and South America**

In Mexico, approximately 10,000 private security firms operate within the country. Yet fewer than half of these firms have employees who possess an official permit. In December 2000, there were 153,885 registered employees, but their actual number is probably significantly higher (Reames, 2005: 1192). In South America, the data are very difficult to find. Only Brazil provides some information for our purposes. A case study suggests that 1,200 private security companies with a total workforce of 400,000 were available for hire in 1998 (Wood and Cardia, 2006: 154). Indeed, the federal police contract with private guards to protect persons, property and assets, especially in metropolitan areas such as those found in São Paulo. Since 1983, the Brazilian security industry has been covered by specialist legislation. Additional research sets estimates on Mexico and Brazil much higher and also presents figures on other countries in Central and Latin America generally (Abelson, 2006).

## **Africa**

Data on Nigeria, Kenya and Sierra-Leone have been gathered recently by Abrahamsen and Williams (2005 a, b, c). In Nigeria, private security is the second largest income earner for the nation after oil and gas. Numbers in the security guard sector may be as high as 100,000. Virtually any business, embassy, non-governmental organization (NGO) and residential compound will have contracts with (armed) private security personnel. Given the huge socio-economic inequalities that exist throughout Kenya, private security is a major industry, generating as many as 48,800 jobs. Security guards are, regardless of the risks they run, not permitted to carry firearms. Because of a brutal civil war which raged across Sierra Leone from 1991 to 2002, security remains a top political priority, hastening a rapid expansion of commercial guarding services. Although numbers may be much higher, there may be as many as 30 security companies operating, employing approximately 3,000 persons.

The security sector in South Africa may be expanding by as much as 30 per cent per year. 1999 figures indicate that, apart from 60,000 'in-house' personnel, the industry employs 350,000 guards. Even when only counting the number of 'in-house' and 'contract' security guards, the police/private security ratio is approximately 1:3.1, or it could be as high as 1:4 (Minnaar and Ngoveni, 2004: 45). However, Shearing and Berg (2006) are more moderate in their estimates. They assume the size of registered security officers was 250,000 in 2004, representing a doubling since 1997. Since the fall of the apartheid regime, a number of multinational firms have become established in South Africa. These massive corporate players absorbed a large number of local security businesses, whose numbers dropped from 5,185 in 2001 to 4,271 in 2003.

## **Asia**

According to Yoshida (1999), the security industry in Japan has grown from 775 companies employing 41,146 guards in 1972 to 8,669 companies employing 377,140 (fulltime and part-time) guards in 1996. The security industry significantly outnumbers

the Japanese police force, comprising, on 1996 figures, over 225,000 officers. Latest data from Japan indicate that this has continued to grow since then, with 459,305 security guards as opposed to approximately 240,000 police officers in 2003 (Yoshida and Leishman, 2006). Government authorities hold powers to sanction security firms that violate the rules by the imposition of strict penalties, imprisonment or the suspension and even termination of business. Even in the centralized market economy that is China, approximately 250,000 Security Service companies had been, by 1999, brought into existence as a free market competitor to the internal security system (Guo, 1999). In the Republic of South Korea, the rate of change has been rapid. From 1978-2005 the numbers of security personnel rose to well over 115,000 (compared with 93,271 police officers), a growth rate of 2,320 per cent (Button et al., 2006).

Data concerning private security in the Middle East is scarce. Countries are mostly governed by strict Islamic regimes which exercise strong control over information on 'sensitive' topics such as crime and safety. Nonetheless, De Jong (2002: 36) has conducted explorative research on the situation in Saudi Arabia and reports that four large security (guarding) companies employ approximately 3,500 staff throughout the country. They are part of a larger industry covering some 40 companies and 16,000 staff. Special legislation dates back to 1992 when the Ministry of the Interior issued *Rules of Private Civil Security*. Strikingly, this law obliges owners of, for instance, banks, jewelry shops and residential compounds to hire commercial guards, boosting the industry's growth throughout the 1990s. There is, however, no evidence that the industry has expanded since then.

### **Australia**

In 1998-99, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2000) recorded 1,714 businesses in security services industries, employing over 31,700 persons (Prenzler, 2005). This list included those firms that identified themselves as such, typically private detectives and inquiry agents, but did not include government security agencies, nor locksmith services, alarm wholesaling and security equipment installation. Licensed security agents, on figures supplied by State licensing agencies in 2003, numbered approximately 140,000, but these figures include individuals who hold multiple licenses. One should compare the number (approximately 48,000 on 2003 figures) of sworn police officers in Australia. Census data show that between 1996 and 2001 the Australian population increased by 6.0 per cent, police numbers increased by 6.5 per cent and security providers by a staggering 31.1 per cent (Prenzler and Sarre, 2006). Being a federation, the legal conditions for private security vary across Australia. Although all states require security guards to have no criminal records, they differ in their legislative requirements concerning training criteria, education levels and other competency standards.



Table 1. Security personnel numbers in various regions of the world

Region	Security force	Region	Security force
<b>South Europe</b>		<b>Africa</b>	
Albania	4,100	Nigeria	+100,000
Bosnia	-	Kenya	48,800
Herzegovina	±2,000	Sierra Leone	+3,000
Croatia	±15,000	South Africa	+250,000
Kosovo	2,580		
Macedonia	3,000	<b>Pacific</b>	
Moldova	+3,000	Australia	+49,400
Montenegro	+1,900		
Serbia	±30,000	<b>Latin America</b>	
Russia	+850,000	Colombia	190,000
Ukraine	33,000	Mexico	150,000–450,000
		Brazil	400,000–570,000
<b>Asia</b>		Venezuela	75,000
Japan	459,305	Chile	45,000
South Korea	115,845	Argentina	75,000
		Peru	50,000
<b>Middle East</b>		Central America	105,000
Saudi Arabia	16,000	Other countries	70,000
<b>North America</b>			
USA	+1,500,000		
Canada	82,000		

### Europe

Given the absence of firm and comparable data, in 1999 De Waard (1999) published a comprehensive international study of private security, covering 27 countries including all the countries of the European Union (EU) at the time, plus 12 others. His study was based upon reports from the European Commission Directorate-General for Employment, Industrial Relations and Social Affairs in 1996. De Waard estimated that there were 592,050 security personnel in the EU. On 1 May 2004, 10 new member states successfully joined the existing 15 member states, and then on 1 January 2007 Bulgaria and Romania were added to the Union bringing the total number to 27. These events had considerable implications for the number of police officers and commercial

security personnel previously counted by De Waard. His estimates were truly in need of revision. An update of European research was provided by Morré (2004) who collected figures for the Confederation of European Security Services (CoESS), the European umbrella association for private security.<sup>2</sup> Additional information about Bulgaria and Romania are drawn from SEESAC (2005), an institution devoted to establishing peace, stability and prosperity in South Eastern and Eastern Europe.<sup>3</sup> Taken together, these reports reveal that the total number of security personnel has more than doubled between 1999 and 2004-05. There are currently approximately 1,255,841 guards active in the Union. The police employ some 1,609,360 officers, by comparison indicating that overall, governments are still the primary players in the field of order maintenance.<sup>4</sup>

Although the present shifts towards private options in policing are likely to continue apace across the EU, there is little reason to think that there will be standardized European-level legislation for the private security industry. The regulation of markets varies significantly from country to country; some countries have strong standards while others have none at all (Button, 2007). Therefore, many questions about public supervision of private security personnel remain largely unanswered. Currently the EU is aspiring to create a real internal market for private security. However, demanding governments like the Dutch fear that their strict legal controls may be undermined. The Dutch thus oppose every effort to compromise authorization and licensing structures, which they believe are crucial for ensuring ethical and professional private security industries. Other critics argue that European standards are too wide and imprecise, as they cover a wide diversity of security activities and sectors. Given a fear of watered-down Europeanization processes, national industry associations have introduced new codes of conduct and quality assurance projects. It is, however, far from clear if and when EU standards will come into effect.

Table 2: Security personnel numbers in the European Union

Country	Total police	Total private security	Police per 100,000 inhabitants	Private security per 100,000 inhabitants	Private security/ police ratio
Austria	30,000	6,790	366	83	0.23
Belgium	39,000	18,320	379	178	0.47
Bulgaria	28,000	130,000	374	1,724	4.6
Cyprus	3,000	1,500	386	193	0.50
Czech Republic	47,400	28,100	465	275	0.59

<sup>2</sup> Further details can be found at <<http://www.coess.org>>.

<sup>3</sup> Further details can be found at <<http://www.seesac.org>>.

<sup>4</sup> See, for more statistics and information on private security in the European Union, van Steden and Sarre (2007) and CoESS / INHES (2008).

Denmark	14,000	5,250	259	97	0.38
Estonia	3,600	4,900	257	350	1.36
Finland	7,500	6,000	144	115	0.80
France	145,000	117,000	240	194	0.81
Germany	250,000	170,000	303	206	0.68
Greece	49,900	25,000	468	234	0.50
Hungary	40,000	80,000	400	800	2.00
Ireland	12,000	20,000	308	513	1.67
Italy	280,000 <sup>5</sup>	55,000	482	95	0.20
Latvia	10,600	5,000	461	217	0.47
Lithuania	20,000	10,000	556	278	0.50
Luxembourg	1,573	2,200	340	476	1.40
Malta	1,800	700	455	176	0.39
Netherlands	49,000	30,000	301	184	0.61
Poland	103,309	200,000	267	518	1.94
Portugal	46,000	28,000	439	267	0.61
Romania	45,830	37,291	207	168	0.81
Slovakia	21,500	20,840	398	386	0.97
Slovenia	7,500	4,500	375	225	0.60
Spain	193,450	89,450	481	215	0.46
Sweden	18,000	10,000	200	111	0.56
United Kingdom	141,398	150,000	235	249	1.06
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,609,360</b>	<b>1,255,841</b>	<b>324</b>	<b>253</b>	<b>0.78</b>

The growth of private security companies in countries outside the EU, in particular the Balkans, is probably a direct result of perceptions of a growing 'market of violence' in the region (Eppler, 2002). Therefore, in these regions, concerns have been raised relating to the (mis)use of weapons, including automatic weapons, by private security (SEESAC, 2005). The same concerns hold for the former Soviet Union, the break-up of which contributed to the spectacular growth of the private sector (Favarel-Garrigues and Le Huérou, 2004). The market is, by and large, divided between detective agencies, private security services (PSSs) and private protection companies (PPCs). In 1999, statistics indicated that almost 200,000 licensed employees (that is, those who are entitled to carry a firearm) were working for security services and protection companies, but the total number probably exceeded 850,000 (Volkov, 2002: 137). Not unlike the position in (South) Eastern Europe, regulatory structures for the private security industry are weak in Russia. Despite a 1992 federal law on private detective and protective activity which gave legal status to the commercial provision of security, business

<sup>5</sup> This number is based on De Waard's (1999) estimate of the Italian police force numbers, because of missing data in the CoESS report.

relations are still highly informal. This informality has had a negative impact on the transparency and accountability of the industry.

### ***Transnational Conglomerates***

Corresponding to the rapid growth of guarding services around the globe, tendencies towards corporate security have bred massive transnational conglomerates. Companies such as the Securitas Group, Group 4 Securicor (G4S), Tyco International, Secom, The Brink's Company, Sohgo Security Services, Chubb, Corrections Corporation of America and Prosegur have allowed a 'globalization' of commercialized security provision to develop. Johnston (2007: 30) has categorized multinational businesses as 'conventional ones' such as guarding services, and 'specialized ones linked to transnational security' such as drug testing and airline protection. Subsequently, multinationals are usually involved in financial risk management, fraud prevention and custodial services. To give an illustration, the Dutch division of G4S has been granted permission to provide guards to detention centers and asylum-seeker centers, which puts the company in a unique business position. A sub-sector of commercial security is penetrating into military operations and warfare. This industry can be divided in 'military providers' sending out guards and soldiers, 'military consultant firms' offering training and advice, and 'military support firms' offering back-up in forms of, for example, logistics and catering (Johnston, 2007: 31). It is currently estimated that there are between 6,000 and 20,000 private security workers (mercenaries) employed in Iraq. Because, obviously, work is extremely dangerous, earnings are high. Contracts valued at hundreds of thousands of U.S. dollars to supply only a relative small amount of guards seem to be the rule rather than the exception.

### ***Explaining Private Security***

In the early days of theorizing private security, commentators tended to interpret the growth of the security industry through a socialist, if not Marxist, prism. Spitzer and Scull (1977), for example, saw an enormous extension of social control in capitalist societies. They wrote, 'the private policing of today is organized as a corporate undertaking; and its major customers are large-scale organizations who invest in policing for the same reason they make other investments: to guarantee profits and secure an environment for uninterrupted growth' (Spitzer and Scull, 1977: 27). Such a radical left-wing view became nuanced somewhat when commentators began to view private policing in the light of other driving factors. This has led to a plethora of explanations, which are summarized below. They go from the general to the particular.

At a broad *sociological* level, trends in private security are depicted as an outcome of 'high modernity'. Concentrating on the nature of contemporary (notably western) life, influential scholars such as Giddens (1990), Beck (1992) and Furedi (2002) have highlighted the double-edged impact that all kinds of today's advancements display. On the one hand, social institutions and technological developments have created opportunities and prosperities that were unthinkable in any pre-modern system. People can nowadays travel around the world, connect with only one mouse click and enjoy a

rewarding existence. But on the other hand, a more somber side of risk and distrust emerge as a globalizing world creates uncertainties, uncontrollable hazards and a 'disembedding' of human relationships. In the context of 'liquid' associations and morals (Bauman, 2000) where extraordinary dynamism and agility find their counterparts in ontological feelings of insecurity, people are collectively yearning for 'safe freedom' (Boutellier, 2004: 35). The vitality of modern lifestyles goes hand in hand with an obsessive desire for protection. This paradoxical situation creates an optimal circumstance within which security industries will proliferate.

From a *criminological* viewpoint, modernity's implicit hope that safety and vitality can be painlessly combined is regularly connected to our changing attitudes towards crime. Not only have crime rates increased sharply over recent decades, fear of crime, and, in a wider sense, disorder have magnified into the sphere of the catastrophic. Garland (2000: 359) even portrays Western societies as 'high crime cultures' where '[f]rom being a problem that mostly affected the poor, crime (and particularly vandalism, theft, burglary and robbery) increasingly became a daily consideration for anyone who owned a car, used the subway, left their house unguarded during the day, or walked the streets at night'. The visibility of crime and incivilities, along with emotions of vulnerability, has spread out to 'civilized' populations – with serious consequences for wrongdoers. These tendencies are further inflamed by the terrorist acts of (and since) September 11, 2001, which have posed new dangers to national security. The result is an omnipresent 'search for security' (Law Commission of Canada, 2001) that mobilizes police officers and private guarding personnel alike to serve and protect the interests of societies' middle and higher classes.

An *economic* perspective lays emphasis on increases in income and wealth, which logically creates more criminal opportunities to steal or damage property, and broadens the consciousness of risks. Combined with the obsessive desire for harm avoidance sketched above, there is a resultant increase in calls for protection, while a rise in affluence generally also generates additional income to pay for it (Kakalik and Wildhorn, 1977; George and Button, 2000). Clearly, urban surroundings like shopping malls, airport terminal and office parks are highly vulnerable to crime, terrorism and disorder: their goods and commodities are within easy reach of many, not always kind-hearted, visitors. This automatically brings into play a fourth, *geographical*, argument. As Shearing and Stenning (1981, 1983) posed a quarter century ago, the ongoing quest for contract guards can be situated within the context of spatial changes. They point to the aforementioned mushrooming of (quasi) public spaces that have eroded the 'steering' role of police forces. Because of the risk of deviant behavior disturbing the ambience of 'mass private properties' like shopping malls and wider communal spaces including town squares, leisure zones and posh neighborhoods (often found in 'gated communities'), paid security staff are routinely active here – a presence that undermines the idea that the 'governance of security' is (if it ever was) the sole monopoly of constitutionally appointed police forces. Policing and security are being restructured along the lines of markets, residential communities and economic classes, a tendency which overthrows the 'Hobbesian-Weberian framework where the public sphere is the sphere of the governors and the private sphere is the sphere of the governed'

(Shearing, 2006: 31). Crime control, put differently, has shattered into a complexity of auspices and providers.

Shearing and Stenning's 'mass private poverty thesis', long regarded as the *key* explanation for private security growth, has been pervasively criticized by several authors (Jones and Newburn, 1999; Van Steden, 2007).<sup>6</sup> Despite being convincingly argued and holding important truths, there is a more fundamental answer to the question 'why' private security industries have prospered so abundantly. This answer closely relates to 'fiscal constraint' or 'overload' theories that stress those public constabularies suffer from inadequate resources. The mammoth burden that societies impose on their police systems outstrips realistic capacities (even if public funding on law enforcement has increased substantially), resulting in transference of order maintenance duties from the public to the private sector. Governments are actively contracting out 'peripheral' functions or simply leave responsibilities to the market. Thus, the main point here is that, in western countries, *government policy* perhaps explains best what is currently happening to policing (Van Steden, 2007). Following Joh (2004: 68),

'[p]rivate police today find themselves the beneficiaries in the debate over the responsibility and capability of government to control crime.'

Although other factors surely play a role, *political dynamics* towards 'responsibilization' and, in a more narrow sense, 'privatization' (Garland, 1996) are fundamental explanations. Only sovereign states and their national parliaments can decide whether private security companies are permitted and licensed to carry out their responsibilities and, if so, how far their mandates should reach. Politicians, public officials and civil servants, far from remaining aloof from commercialization trends and increasing freedoms to move people, goods, information, money and services around the globe, continue to be central players in setting binding guidelines, monitoring upcoming self-regulating schemes and weeding out malpractice. However, in developing nations, the situation is arguably quite different as states are less capable of channeling and regulating private security growth.

### ***Consequences of Private Security***

Given the extraordinary and global growth of private security described above, its 'quality of life impact' (Prenzler, 2004: 283) is still remarkably under researched. Scholars, but also politicians and policy-makers, take the presence of contract guards for granted as 'minor' players in the policing landscape. Governments, in general, have facilitated and even stimulated the unobtrusive appearance of contract guards, but have

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<sup>6</sup> Underlying this thesis, Shearing and colleagues claim that the presence of private auspices (i.e., businesses, communities and individuals) have shifted power relations between the state, market and civil society. The state is now one 'node' (albeit an important one) in a 'polycentric' or 'networked' world (Bayley and Shearing, 2001; Johnston and Shearing, 2003; Wood and Shearing, 2007).

responded quite sluggishly to the need for regulation (Brodeur and Shearing, 2005: 394–395), implying an attitude of indifference and neglect. This is a mistake. Private security industries have developed into firm social institutions, which, like families, governments and churches, represent and carry out well-organized practices and normative functions in the world today.

This development, according to some, is more a tragedy than a comedy (e.g., Loader, 1997a; Manning, 1999). Private security, as a social institution, embodies ‘the character of a civil war in miniature – it depicts a society engaged in a struggle with itself. And though this may sometimes be necessary, it is never anything other than a necessary evil.’<sup>7</sup> The tragic quality of contract guards, in short, is that everybody needs private security, but nobody really wants it. No matter how well entrepreneurs are organized and how well they try to distance themselves from unsavory ‘cowboy companies’, their private security industries are bound to be beset with enduring tensions and difficulties.

First, contract guards are widely perceived as a ‘grudge purchase’ – a perception that hampers good payment, worthwhile salaries, innovative developments and first-class services. Although training schemes have sometimes been professionalized, requirements and standards vary greatly from country to country. Therefore, various academic observers voice criticism about the social, physical and ethical skills of private security guards (e.g., Zedner, 2006b). Guards must not be confused with police officers, even though they are granted ever more tasks and responsibilities. So how effective are they in providing security? Do security guards really provide second-rate services as has often been assumed?

Second, the implications of private guards’ client-centered mandates are commonly presumed to contravene civil liberties, to focus upon poor communities and compromise human rights. As touched upon earlier, private operatives seem to primarily serve individual interests, not those of society as a whole. Does this mean we drift towards ever more closed malls and communities, as already found in the USA, South Africa and Latin America? And how does this influence the lives of the excluded and marginalized? States that are ‘weak’ or ‘failing’ – ‘where the capability of the state to perform its essential functions has largely disappeared’ and ‘basic state institutions, if they still exist, are largely dysfunctional’ (Dupont et al., 2003: 332) – seem particularly vulnerable to private security invasion. Will their police forces deteriorate?

Finally, and most urgently, what is the effect of privatized security services on the ‘symbolic’ and ‘binding’ power of policing functions? In Loader’s (1997b: 8) formulation: ‘the idea of policing [...] brings to mind (and stomach) sensations of order, authority and protection; it makes it possible for people to believe that a powerful force for good stands between them and an anarchic world, that the state is willing to defend its

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<sup>7</sup> This phrase is borrowed from Garland (1990: 292). He analyzed punishment as a social institution. However, it can be argued that private security industries are part and parcel of the punishment institution. Their rise can be seen as a logical extension of risk management aimed at controlling economic losses by punishing (perceivably) deviant and dangerous groups through exclusion (Young, 1999).

citizens.’ Are contract guards also capable of being such a powerful force? Are they able to generate the aura of reassurance that surrounds the public police? Scholars doubt and even fear that private security will eventually weaken policing as a ‘thick’ communal good – a prerequisite for upholding the ‘irreducibly social’ and ‘deeply implicated’ relationships with our fellow citizens (Loader and Walker, 2001: 26).

### CONCLUSION: WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

In an attempt to answer the foregoing questions, observers should continue to turn their gaze to several research agendas (Bayley and Shearing, 2001; Sarre, 2005). Researchers should, first of all, map out ‘similarities and differences within and between different jurisdictions’ and ‘gain a better understanding of social reality in different national contexts’ (Jones and Newburn, 2006a: 2). Only through these exercises can patterns and trends be observed and analyzed. Some significant research work has been undertaken to critique appropriate and effective models of cooperation between, specifically, public and private personnel. This research reveals that, while public and private managers alike have lauded close cooperation, the rhetoric often fails to match the reality (Johnston, 1996; Jones and Newburn, 1998; Sarre and Prenzler, 2000; Wakefield, 2003; Van Steden, 2007).

Nevertheless, there is still much to be done. Researchers should put more efforts in determining what the precise rewards and perils of various private security arrangements are. Although contract guards are obviously vested with an exclusionary mandate towards anything that contravenes the interests of their paying clientele (potentially to the detriment of the common good), governments also develop and adapt to new arrangements and regulations that match the changing realities of policing. For example, a Dutch phenomenon is the introduction of privately delivered, but publicly employed (sworn-in) ‘special constables’ (*Buitengewoon Opsporingsambtenaren*) working for regulatory and investigatory agencies. Although these officials originally have a *private* status, they become embedded in the *public* system, ensuring effective checks and balances.

However, in practice, privatization processes have most commonly not taken this form, meaning that constitutional protections are frequently absent and are unlikely to be politically supported whether sooner or later. Such a political reluctance is not entirely accidental, because, as Sklansky (2006: 104–105) shrewdly notes:

[t]he central idea of private policing is to bring the disciplined mindset of business to the problems of order maintenance and crime control – and perhaps also, in the bargain, to relieve the government of some costly obligations. At some point, bringing public values to private policing is like redesigning the Hummer to make it lighter and more fuel-efficient: you can do it, but if what you really care about is gas mileage, you may be better off with a different prototype.



Therefore, research should continue to gather empirical evidence about principles, interests, mentalities and accountability models in order to better determine the challenges private security industries pose to 'law and justice' criteria. The future of policing and security governance, in an environment where the needs of order maintenance change on a regular basis, demands no less.

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